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# Social inclusion of young people from the most disadvantaged social strata of the population in their community and school

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## Abstract

This paper analyses the social inclusion of young people from the most disadvantaged social strata of the population in a community, in Brazil. Focal interviews were conducted with two groups, protagonists and non protagonists of violence, in two public schools. The analysis indicates the two groups attend different places, have different expectations of leisure, and life activities are also differentiated. Young people not considered protagonists of violence believe in shape their own future and the importance of the school. The protagonists don't. For them, school is just for fun, not to conquer a better future.

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## 1. Introduction

The purpose of the paper is to characterize and analyze social inclusion ways of young people in a Brazilian city belonging to the most disadvantaged social strata of the population in their community, schools and leisure spaces.

The research was conducted in an area with large socioeconomic deprivation and high rates of urban violence and criminality. Social indicators of violence and poverty are high. Neighborhoods infrastructure is missing where standard popular housing predominate. Research area is considered one of the most violent areas of the city. During the research it was possible to note that robberies, fights, deaths, police action and drug abuse are common facts.

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These neighborhoods present high density population along with low socioeconomic index. There are neither green areas nor leisure spaces for the local population. There are several churches and a large number of bars, but few public health clinics and schools. The economic activities are mostly related to petty trading and informal service.

City Schools in the neighborhood attended by young people are the focal point of this research, which we are denominating School 1 and School 2. Both schools serve students in Elementary Cycle II School (5th- 8th grades) and High School students. The building of the School 1 is quite vandalized and has broken walls around and his painting lies dirty and tarred. The school does not cause a good impression given the lack of conservation, the state of abandonment and penury. The building is dark and lacking hygiene. Police action is common within the school. The school shows marks of vandalism and intrusions that are almost on a daily basis. The other school, the School 2, already makes a good impression. The building is very well maintained, clean and free of graffiti. The concern towards the conservation of the school building is constant, however some students eventually spray paint the school which makes it constantly to be painted and repainted. Family breakdown, domestic violence, minor in social risk and without basic health care and nutrition, early access to the labor market and the use of illicit drugs become part of the lives of the students of this school. Facts that are recent history of this institution, although situated in a neighborhood of impoverished urban outskirts that had no previous problems, and it is considered to be a good school.

This study consisted of two groups in each school: one with students considered violence protagonists, which we will call here the GV1 and GV2 as being students of Schools 1 or 2, respectively; and another with students not considered violence protagonists (GNV 1 and GNV2 as the origin is the School 1 or School 2). The GV group was formed from the analysis of the occurrence school records and the statement of the management team. Both boys and girls participate in the groups and their ages ranged from 14 to 17 years old. Focal interviews (GATTI, 2005) with students of these groups aimed to map the locations frequented by them, identify the meaning of becoming part of the community and also the meaning they impute to school and studies. The discursive regularities present in their statements were analyzed and are presented below.

## **2. The place where they live: neighborhoods and the community**

The typical urban landscapes of impoverished outskirts of Brazilian cities are present in the speech of students interviewed. The poor infrastructure in the region is constantly cited:

They (the city hall) say that they will asphalt our streets but it is all stones (GV2). This neighborhood has nothing working (GNV1). The childcare they were building stopped for a few months. I think that the money ends up. We pay taxes and do not have money for anything. (GNV1).

However, sometimes, interviewed youth individuals from GNV Group attenuate the criticism of City Hall to mention that some local young people damage the existing public works, indicating a process of "naturalization" of the conditions of the neighborhood: Only because of the youths living there. The socioeconomic level do not appear to be an explanation for the precarious situation in which they live and the neighborhoods where they live. However the absence of the Government apparatus in the neighborhoods is noted and faithfully manifested in their statements indicating the non-existence of government people among residents:

They (mayor, politicians) begin and do not end. They are not living in the neighborhood (GNV1). Or mention the presence of illicit drug users and dealers in the neighborhoods:

Interviewer: Tell us how the neighborhood is? It is full of junkies; you go out into the street and you can smell the entire day (GV1).

Interviewer: Smell what? Marijuana (GV1). It's everywhere (GV1)

They concern, as an attempt to solve the problem, the presence of police. For them the absence of any authority of the State in the neighborhood allows dealers to establish their own rules and arrangements for the organization and operation of the site:

Thus, for example, the thief steals your home and you discover who he is, if you are going to beat him it will be bad for you. So the bandit helps you. (GV2).

When asked about their feelings about the neighborhood, youngsters show they like the place. However, public service shortages, insecurity and lack of rule does not stimulate some form of "civic compassion" (SENNETT 2008, p 373.), favoring the formation of complex resigned filiations:

Interviewer: What do you think could be done? You want to change something in the neighborhood? I do, Take these junkies out of our neighborhood. But there's no way. Everywhere is like that, filled with junkies (GV1). They should create a neighborhood to junkies (GV1)

The existence and experiences of common elements in the community that could facilitate aggregation and make the space community filiations is simultaneously the desire of exclusion and / or restriction to the coexistence of other young people. Thus, the relationship with the other kids in the neighborhood seems to go beyond a simultaneous stay.

### **3. The use of their free time, leisure activities and frequented locations.**

The activities on their free time, distracted with school shifts indicate some heterogeneity: stay home, take charge of household chores, biking, fly kites, go to malls, theaters and churches. Occasionally doing some informal paid work.

In GNV Group activities after school are generally related to the frequency of extracurricular courses such as English and Information technology, sports and cultural activities. In this case, the after school activities make a more explicit purpose of individual formation. Through extra courses they seek access to a labor skill that would leave the precarious state in which they live. Attending to courses where they learn handcrafting, music and sports have a more direct relationship with their leisure and free time. In the other group being at the streets are related to hanging out with friends, wandering and sticking around aimlessly. In both groups access to nightly activities as parties are negotiated with family

Being at the streets with friends are present and part of everyday life, but all the statements suggests a low level of friendships because many youngster of GNV Group say they have no friends . Several of the members of GNV Group, both boys and girls , say they do not like to leave home, have few friends, and that their friends are , in general, their relatives; that the relationship with other young people of the neighborhood is small and that schoolmates hardly become your friends. Therefore, while deepening into the speeches we realized that having few friends seems to be particularly true when the reference are friends who live in the neighborhoods where they live. The friendships seem to be closer to relatives, such as cousins and young residents of other neighborhoods. But such a situation is not characteristic of this group only, as it is also found in the GV group, where we find demonstrations on replacement activities with friends in favor of activities with family.

The youngsters of GNV group, in general, seem to have a more controlled leisure attending a few environments where they may be exposed to violence and crime. However, the prohibition of parents to illicit drug abuse is present in the speech of all the people in both groups. There are, however, in their speeches, an indication of the constant presence and ease of access to legal and illegal drugs. Access to illicit drugs seems to solely depend on their desire:

I do not use. Anyone uses if they want. There is no law that arrests users if you want to use. Because if I come up with a joint and offer it to others, only smoke who wants. Now if the guys arrive to me and offer me another kind of drug and I do not want to, I do not want it, period. (GV2)

Family interventions appear to be ineffective as prohibitions on drug usage, being more effective in relation to the prohibition of frequented spaces.

The street, the neighborhood, the youngster of other neighborhoods, schools and families are significant in the composition of friendships to activities related to their free time. However, the frequented spaces and leisure activities at this time do not refer, in the interviewees, joint activities indicating only simultaneous and parallel stays. The testimonies of GNV Group, the tendency to isolation or self isolation is remarkable, since it's imposed by them, because parents want them to leave, have fun and make friends. There seems to adopt avoidance logic of other local young people who are seen as drug addicts.

All of this indicates that there is not a common denominator that can match together young people from

impoverished neighborhoods. Statements of the youths of the two groups refer the idea of a cluster of people living together your day by day, but do not share it between themselves. Here there is an indication of filiation's complex or affiliation supported by confluent stays more in common space than any other gregarious element. The filiation's complexes in leisure spaces, where the relations of friendship prevail seem to be fluid, short-lasting and permanent.

#### 4. The other group

The references in the speeches of the other youth groups practically focus on the existence of "junkies" and their ways to stay in their neighborhood, at school and in leisure spaces:

They steal things, even the equipments in the playground they stole. Also steal copper wire to sell and buy "stone"(crack). Another day stole up the wire of school and we lost power for a week (GV1). They disturb us. They usually is messing with others who are on the street (GNV1). It's scary to leave the house, feels like they will do something to harm you. (GNV2).

The junkies are appointed by the members of GNV Groups CNG as justification for not having a friendship in the neighborhood and strengthening the statements about the importance of choosing the places where you go, not attend punk ballads and parties, to choose the companies with whom they hang out, even if it means having few friends.

The daily presence of "junkies" attracts the police in spaces for conviviality: They (junkies) are not afraid of the police. The police are afraid of them, if there is a police car and there is a group of junkies, they do not stop. They pretend you never saw them (GV1). I skipped school classes lesson and they stopped me and my colleague, they body checked and send us away (GV1). Last week, they (the police) came here at school and we were just sitting there. No one was doing anything, but they arrived as if we were a bunch of thug. Made everyone raise their hands up, screaming (GNV1).

The police actions thus appear in the speeches sometimes associated with "junkies", sometimes associated with them and sometimes described with neutrality and sometimes with indignation of the brutality. It is evident; however, between the GV groups an idea that some illegal drugs are tolerable since the routine does not disrupt the boundary or affect other daily tasks, as shown in this dialog:

I smoke drugs in my house, for anyone to see. You have to smoke it for you and not for others. That one only watches television. He just sits there sipping tea (smoking marijuana). Oh the guys here, calling me a junkie Tea is a drug? Tea is tea. (GV2)

The constant depredation that the School 1 is subjected, which is attributed to the junkies of the neighborhood, is highlighted in the speeches criticizing this behavior. Striking-episodes as placing a boy upside down the toilet or hanging in another one in the sports court is counted and recounted. The junkies that are addicts, thugs, hooligans and troublemakers tend to be blamed for the precarious situation of the School 1.

The word junkie comes almost as a category encompassing any kind of addict, employed by drug trafficking or not, that spends their days seeking ways to maintain their addiction. References to other youth groups are sparse. Only the group of young people who attend churches seems to have power to connect to another group.

## 5. The school

The school as a space of confluence for simultaneous stays and reference to the possible formation of friendships has some similarity to the leisure environments traits.

As soon as I entered this school they sometimes smoked (marijuana) in the bathroom. I got to see. Then I never saw anything like that (GNV1). There are only a few using drugs at school (GNV1). In the school, I never saw it (GNV1). There was a boy in the classroom who took the chair, the top of the chair and hit the glass, then the whole damn glass fell on the other side (GNV1). There was a fight with the teachers, sometimes it is a mess here. There was a teacher who hit the boy (GV2).

Thinking of the school as autonomous space, although inserted in the neighborhood is difficult. Thus, interviewees speak of depredations and acts of vandalism committed by young people in school, as shown in this dialogue between students of GV Group at School 1

They broke girl's bathroom. t's people from within the school. Just like last month, people stole the wiring and fans

I guess they should call the school police because there's always people jumping the walls, there are people who are on the street and drop bombs inside.

The presence of the police who eventually enter the School 1 is commented, generating controversy and contributing to the confusion rather than border demarcation between the logics of the street and the school:

When I came here I was scared too, had lots of police, lots of drugs, lots of fighting, even with scissors. It was scary. I wanted to get out, but then I got used to it, now I do not go out of here (GNV1).

The eventual presence of police, the fact that the students use drugs, the school being constantly vandalized, approaches the logic that prevails in the streets making it an indistinct spot of the others: When I joined in here they told me: you will die; you will get shot (GNV1). How many days we were in classes and had junkies smoking weed (GNV1)

School / neighborhood / street differentiation is difficult, because the school is perceived to be penetrated by the district and its logics. Students seek, however, to differentiate it by saying that the motivations to act this way in schools stems from specific aspects of the school and not for the lack of family supervision:

I have used drugs within the school, even smoked, used ecstasy. No one realizes, it's just you get smart and be quiet.

Interviewer: Why do you use in school? Because we are tired of teachers who only want to send us away (GV2).

Also at School 1 students say:

I think it's because they feel sorrow by teachers, I think they don't like teachers (GV1) because there are lacking teachers every day. Sometime we go to school and come back because there is nobody there (GV1).

We go out too early, do not come out right on schedule and there is a lack of teachers to give lessons (GNV1).

However, shortening explanations to organizational factors of the school seems to be insufficient so that students from GNV Groups feel ultimately responsible so they cannot distinguish the specificity of the school against other spaces:

They discuss about which teacher is hotter. They keep saying to teacher to make porn videos. (GNV1) Some teachers leave the classroom crying. There was a student that punctured all four tires of a teacher because he yells so much in class. (GNV1). This way they end up proposing the expulsion of some students of the school in an attempt to preserve, differentiate and rescue it from the logic of the street: You should send all away (GNV1). Expelled from school (GNV1).

From one side there is a negative image of the school which causes even fear to study there and other side the pleasure to be there, to study there because the image of the school should not be confused with the actual facts:

Some of my relatives said they had a mess here, prostitution and drugs. They wanted me to study elsewhere. But I think there is not this kind of thing they say, prostitution, drugs and smoking. Now the bad thing is the mess. It's a bit of overstatement (GNV1).

The logic of the street penetrates the school and tenses relations both at School 1 and School 2, despite the separation in School 2 school district that seems to be more marked, perhaps by the best physical conditions and preservation of the school.

School space differs from the streets or recreation spaces by the specificity that is characteristic of the school; however, their proposals are sometimes mixed up when switching elements. In this picture the teaching ends, particularly among young GV Groups, and do not represent the basis for future life project design. The importance of the school seems to be better preserved for the young protagonists of non-violence. For them, the expectation of a better future is associated with school, but this depends on personal effort. For the youth of GNV Groups the school has an importance in the future life projects that cannot be affronted except in terms of educational quality.

## 6. Final considerations

The neighborhood was established as a site for daily coexistence. Thus, the characteristics and implications that are inherent to living in the neighborhood periphery inhabited by low-income individuals appear regularly in the discursive manifestation. Living in these neighborhoods sometimes evokes moments and desires of self isolation and hinders the development of filiations' complex or relationship affiliation making it hard to establish shared everyday relationships. This situation divided into confined and unlinked spaces ( SENNETT 2008 , 2004) , hinders the perception of the possibility of political action or exercising any resistance and intervention in this space . Readings and interpretations are prejudiced because daily life occurrences consisting of factors transcending the boundaries of a normal life that could exit the social micro relations as the axis to interpret and explain the world. When considering the possibility of community, even fragile, also lies in the existence of some natural " type of shared understanding ' "and "tacit" " (BAUMAN , 2003 , p.16 ) , the narratives of the participants apparently have not shown some understanding as the reflections are specific and singled

The permanence of the enlarged family image as a strong reference in intimacy relations accentuates the perception of spaces for spending free time extra family to not appear as a catalyst to social integration. The school, recreation spaces and even the neighborhood remains generally as a place for crowded people in concomitant stays, disconnected and without any The school spaces gaining street contours eventually lose its meaning in building life projects. This is the reason why school environment is not composed as a potential breakout point of everyday relationships. As Arendt (2011) says the gradual loss of the school specificity as a privileged space for reflection and also as a material failure to perform such instrumentalization, catalyzes the evanescence of resistance.

Anyway, their statements refer to the idea of a cluster of people living together their day to day, but not sharing it. Young people seem to be shuffling emotions ranging from isolation, taboos and beliefs in personal effort pointing to a non overview so that resistance to living do not extrapolate the individual, summarizing and being channeled for personal effort. There is not a sense of common destiny, shared so that each one will live his life as possible, without the perception of any connection between them. In other words, there are not life experience sharing, but clusters of people, each isolated in their own world, making it difficult to build a sense of community and collectivity. The living resistances do not go beyond the individual. This is the way young people do and become invisible in and for the city.

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